

V.L.: As far as I am aware, Spitsbergen coal comprises a modest share in the total volume of coal output in the USSR. And so the question unwittingly crops up: is the game worth the candle, is "Arktikugol's" activity economically advantageous to the State? In addition to the cost of mining and transporting coal to the mainland, there are also considerable expenditures on the supply of materials, machinery, and provisions to the settlements...

N.G.: I don't think I need to hurry with an unequivocal answer to this question. The point is that the archipelago has still not been sufficiently investigated by geologists, and from the standpoint of its economic development it is too early to make a final judgement as to its likely prospects.

What is more, the capacity of the principal mines in our settlements of Barentsburg and Pyramid is 500,000 tonnes of coal per year. This represents a rich energy source for Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. The mines are operating smoothly; almost all above-plan output is effected by an increase in labour productivity, the level of which, incidentally, exceeds the industry's average rate by a factor of 1.4. As of today, mines are supplied with more than two years worth of mineable coal. We are prospecting for new deposits. In accordance with a program for the development of mines up to the year 2000, other measures are being carried out, which will ensure the stable functioning of enterprises.

I would particularly like to remark on the following feature. Arctic mines, unlike their "colleagues" on the mainland, are diversified enterprises. Coal mining is "Arktikugol's" principal, but not sole, activity. We must guarantee the normal life of mining settlements, engage the